

# freep / news / michigan

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- [Brian Dickerson](#)
- [Rochelle Riley](#)

## SECTIONS

- [Today's stories](#)
- [Metro](#)
- [Wayne](#)
- [Oakland](#)
- [Macomb](#)
- [Michigan](#)
- [Casinos](#)
- [Roadwork](#)
- [Education](#)
- [Health](#)
- [Children First](#)
- [Weather](#)
- [Politics](#)
- [Religion](#)
- [Obituaries](#)
- [Nation/World](#)
- [AP wire](#)

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## Bush installs Schornack to post overseeing Great Lakes

March 30, 2002, 11:00 AM

President Bush has bypassed Congress to install five officials, including a top aide to Gov. John Engler whose appointment to a job overseeing Great Lakes issues was facing opposition.

Dennis L. Schornack will serve as commissioner and chairman of the International Joint Commission for the United States and Canada. Bush announced the appointments Friday at the start of a long Easter weekend on his Texas ranch.

Bush installed the officials as recess appointments, avoiding Senate confirmation by putting them in their jobs while Congress was on a break. Such appointments are valid through the next session of Congress, in this case the end of next year.

Each was nominated "to fill a critical position in the administration that can no longer go unoccupied," said White House spokesman Gordon Johndroe.

At issue was Schornack's opposition to a federal ban on Great Lakes drilling. U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., who helped push through the ban, had said she wasn't sure how hard Schornack would work with Canadian officials to implement it.

A message seeking comment was left Saturday with Stabenow's office in Washington.

Seventeen Democratic state House members sent a letter to Stabenow and U.S. Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., last year urging them to withhold their support of Schornack's nomination. The letter was written by Rep. Julie Dennis, D-Muskegon.

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"I think it's the wrong move for the Great Lakes State, and the reason being is that he's a purely political individual," Dennis said Saturday. "He is not about what is best for the Great Lakes."

Engler sharply criticized the federal ban because he said it lets the federal government interfere with an issue that should be left up to the states and Canadian provinces surrounding the lakes. Schornack echoed that criticism.

"I am especially pleased that the IJC will be headed by a person who understands so well the issues surrounding the Great Lakes and their importance to Michigan," Engler said in a statement.

The Republican governor had been prepared to have the state issue more leases for oil and gas wells that drill from shore under the Great Lakes until the federal ban was passed and signed into law by Bush as part of a budget bill.

The federal law bans federal agencies from issuing permits for new drilling through September 2003 to study the environmental effects.

Legislation to prohibit new drilling for oil and natural gas under Michigan's portion of the Great Lakes was sent to Engler earlier this month.

As Engler's special adviser for strategic initiatives, Schornack has advised Engler on directional drilling under the Great Lakes and on possible political repercussions if tax breaks were granted for a water-bottling plant in Mecosta County owned by The Perrier Group of America Inc.

A message seeking comment was left Saturday at Schornack's office in Lansing.

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